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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000333

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [CASC](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: CHURCH MEMBERS ORDERED DEPORTED, APPARENTLY FOR
PROSELYTIZING

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(SBU) KEY POINTS

-- 31 Americans and perhaps as many as 80 non-Americans affiliated with Grace Fellowship or Al Shamal home churches have been ordered deported from Qatar, possibly for proselytizing.

-- The GOQ has not provided Embassy Doha, or the persons facing deportation, with an official reason for the order.

-- Ambassador immediately engaged GOQ officials and is engaging his counterparts at other Embassies since first becoming aware May 19 of this issue.

-- The Prime Minister's office is aware of our concerns; the Minister of State for Interior Affairs and an MFA Assistant Minister are looking into the deportation orders, and Ambassador is expected to have one or more meetings the week of May 25.

-- MFA has told the Ambassador that the limiting date of the deportation orders, which give the recipients two weeks to leave the country, will be delayed by one week while GOQ officials look into the matter.

(SBU) COMMENTS

-- Americans facing deportation who have spoken with Embassy personnel state that they have not proselytized.

-- It is not clear what exactly constitutes "proselytizing" in Qatar.

-- As we learn more about the events described here, Embassy Doha will appropriately update the Country Specific Information for Qatar.

-- Since "Church City" opened outside Doha in March 2008, the GOQ has advised Christian fellowships that they must affiliate with one of the churches (Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Church of England, etc.) housed on the premises. Grace Fellowship has been in discussions with the Church of England in this regard. Grace Fellowship is currently unaffiliated and holds services in a rented villa.

-- Unlike Grace Fellowship, Al Shamal has not applied for church registration with the GOQ.

-- Within the last two years, 16 Americans and non-Americans reportedly have been deported for proselytizing, although the reasons for their deportation have not always been clear in every case.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (SBU) Based on current information available to Embassy Doha, the Ministry of the Interior has ordered the deportation of 31 American citizens, representing nine families, apparently for proselytizing. American citizen and other Embassy contacts have told us that a group of non-Americans, perhaps as many as 80, have also been ordered deported.

¶2. (SBU) The GOQ has not yet provided the Embassy with a reason for the deportation orders, but the Ambassador is seeking additional detail, including the justification for the deportations. Persons receiving deportation orders are all affiliated with Grace Fellowship or Al Shamal, both non-denominational Protestant church groups.

¶3. (SBU) Since Embassy Doha first became aware May 19 of the deportation orders, Ambassador has engaged MFA Assistant Minister of Follow-Up Affairs Mohamad Al-Rumaihi (who earlier this month became responsible for the religious freedom portfolio within the GOQ), Minister of State for Interior Affairs Shaykh Abdullah bin Khalid Al Thani (whose Ministry issues and enforces deportation orders), and the office director for the Prime Minister. Ambassador expects to see the Prime Minister next week, and intends to raise the issue with him then.

¶4. (SBU) Assistant Minister Al-Rumaihi told Ambassador May 19 that he was unaware of the ordered deportations but that he would look into the issues involved. He later reported to Ambassador that he had succeeded in delaying the effective

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date of the deportation orders by one week. (Note: Americans citizens receiving these orders had told Consul Ponce prior to Al-Rumaihi's intervention that they were required to leave Qatar within two weeks, or a week following the end of the school year for families with children.)

¶5. (C) Trying to be helpful, Al-Rumaihi advised Ambassador that challenging the deportation orders in court -- assuming proselytizing is the underlying cause -- would not be advisable, since under Qatari law persons accused of proselytizing face a prison sentence of up to three years.

¶6. (SBU) Shaykh Abdullah told Ambassador May 21 by phone that he would meet with him the week of May 25 to discuss the deportation orders. The Prime Minister's office director said he would make the Prime Minister aware of the issue, while encouraging Ambassador to continue his communications with Shaykh Abdullah and Assistant Minister Al-Rumaihi.

¶7. (SBU) Ambassador is engaging his counterparts at other Embassies, including those of the United Kingdom and South Africa, whose citizens reportedly face deportation.

LeBaron